

## 'Eavesdropping' on the Pages helps to inspire women as they age

By Cynthia Washam

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Kendra Brown, experienced psychologist, the one who was supposed to have the answers, was at a loss. She'd had a spate of patients who'd fallen into a funk once their careers ended and the kids moved out, and she wasn't sure how to pull them out of it.

So she gathered five aging friends and friends of friends to mull over life's ups and downs.

"I wanted to meet with these women because I needed strategies," said the 73-year-old Stuart psychologist. "We were just going to meet a few times."

Most of the women didn't know more than one other group member. They had no idea how long the group would last. They certainly never imagined their muses would fill the pages of a paperback book. They were just up for some stimulating talk.

"I love groups," said 73-year-old Edith Donohue of Stuart, a retired human-resources executive turned independent career counselor, "and I knew Kendra was good at pulling groups together."

Brown's twice-monthly meetings stretched into three years. At each session, the women discussed a different issue — creating a circle of friends, finding fulfilling activities after retirement, managing family demands over the holidays.

Brown didn't think of the group's discussions as anything more than lively food for thought until she started listening to their recorded sessions.

"I laughed and laughed," she said.

She realized a book of their conversations might inspire women struggling with the changes of aging. To protect their privacy, Brown gave them fictitious names and backgrounds. But the conversations filling the pages of her book "Eavesdropping" are real. For their key role, Brown dubbed her friends the "Pages."

Some of the Pages had been through divorces. Others had lost spouses. One lost a son.

"If they'd had a flawless, easy life," Brown said, "I never would have invited them."

Brown chose them for their way of dealing with life's flaws.

"The sessions were very positive, even if the incident was negative," said 82-year-old Mary-Jo Horton, a retired retail executive from Palm City.

By sharing their feelings among friends, the Pages were able to avoid the lows Brown's isolated friends could not. They helped not only Brown, in dealing with her patients; they also helped themselves.

Brown might have ended the book with her Pages' conversation on end-of-life decisions. It was her husband, attorney James "Mac" Stuckey, who persuaded her to add a chapter showing readers how they could create their own group.

Horton captured the spirit of how the group evolved over three years.

"We became so intimately connected," she said. "We had been strangers."



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